Whenever two or more people gather, it's safe to say there are patterns. Patterns can be helpful, unhelpful or neutral – their impact depends on how they are played out in the group. For that reason, the list below does not separate "good" patterns from "bad." The Work of the Group is to identify the patterns that exist, determine which are not helping and need to be let go, and which are useful and need to be amplified. This short list is intended to help practitioners begin to identify which patterns may be present in your group(s).

Common Group Patterns

- *Something begins well and then gets stuck*
- *Affinity groups form*
- *We decide everything by consensus*
- *We carry personal "baggage" from the past into this group experience*
- *Apathy is used as a blocking technique*
- *The people that are willing to lead are always the same people*
- *We may think we're a group, but actually we are many independent thinkers*
- *Baggage from the organization shows up*
- *People are courageous*
- *We get bogged in detail or indecision*
- *We remember what is most important*
- *We forget to align actions with mission*
- *We have a culture of honesty*
- *We have a culture of fear and retribution*
- *It's always been done this way*
- *People listen deeply before acting*

- *Polarities emerge*
- *We protect "the elephant" in the room*
- *Someone tries to fix others*
- *We are willing to witness pain and allow individuals to heal*
- *We stay at the surface instead of going deep*
- *We avoid conflict*
- *Someone goes on and on and we want them to stop but don't say anything*
- *We learn together from our mistakes*
- *Two people get into an argument and go back and forth*
- *Non participation by members*
- *We have a history of mistrust*
- *We don't know how to interpret or interrupt cultural patterns*
- *There are dominant and quiet people*
- *We think we aren't smart enough, or need someone with more clout, knowledge, contacts, money, etc.*
- *Meeting norms are not clear*

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How to identify and name patterns

1. Tune in to self and group awareness:

   - What am I feeling?
   - Am I/are we engaged, confused, bored, sleepy, angry?
   - When am I/are we at the worst? What is happening then?
   - When am I/are we at the best? What is happening then?
   - Do the same kinds of things keep happening to me/us?

2. Check it out with others:

   - Does anyone else see/feel this too?
   - Do we do this often?
   - Is this helping us or getting in our way?

Ways to shift or let go of unhelpful patterns

- *Create time for reflection and dialogue*

- *Someone courageous names the pattern and this starts a conversation*

- *Someone brings up the unspoken thing*

- *Let go of the agenda and be present with where the group is right now*

- *Have people talk in small groups about what is happening right now*

- *Refer to procedure to make a decision*

- *Take some time to write so people can gather their thoughts*

- *Ask for clarification*

- *When people get quiet, ask: "Are we stuck, or just still?"*

- *Change seats; change perspectives*

- *Take a break; stop the action*

- *Check in with one or two people*

- *Stop moving toward a solution*

- *Allow venting in a structured way*

- *Make it ok to be in chaos*

- *Name what you care about*

- *Make statements of appreciation*

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